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CONNECTICUT GRAVESTONES
II

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(Concluded from vol. 16, page 31)

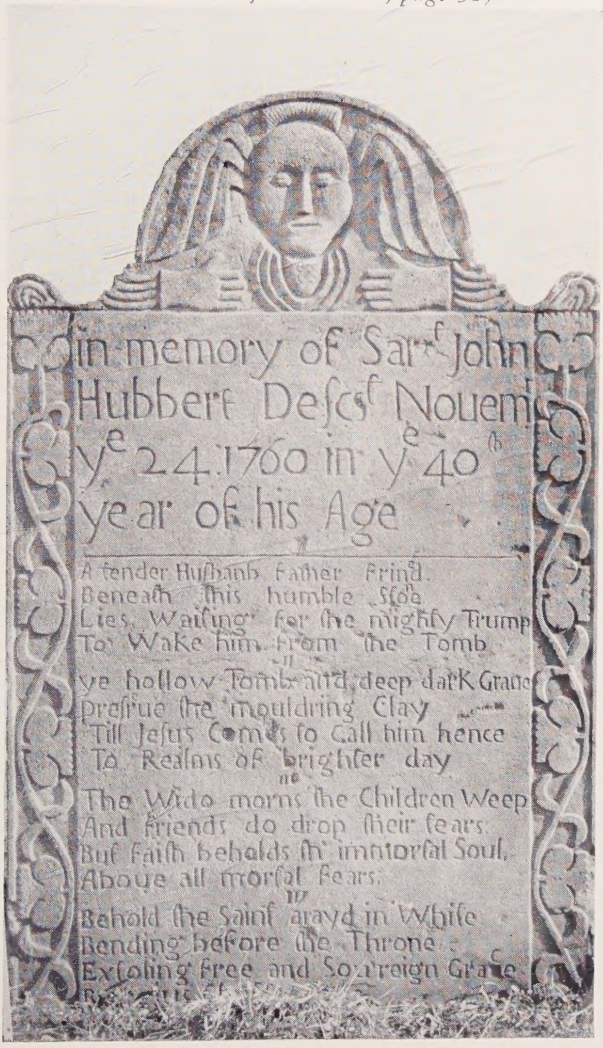

Fig. 1

JAMES STANCLIFT (1692-1772)

Of seven James Stanclifts who lived on the "Est syd the grate River" in Middletown at one time or another during the eighteenth century, one died in infancy, two more, to the amateur genealogist's delight, considerately moved to other towns, and the remainder were direct in line from James the first. James the second, as he was sometimes called, on April 4, 1713, agreed to sell his share of his father's estate to his brother, William, for £31, yet the Winthrop-Hamlin correspondence of May 2, 1713, suggests that the two brothers were still associated in making gravestones. It appears likely, therefore, that James had decided to work for William, that is until an influential and subtle force by the name of Abigail Bevin made him change his mind. A few weeks after he married her, twenty-two-year-old James Stanclift decided to go in business for himself, because he then (June 18, 1714) repurchased from William a small part of the original Stanclift quarry with its "wood timber stones mines and minerals," as well as a homelot abutting easterly on some common land, which, incidentally, later became the Chatham burial ground. A letter written on April 16, 1715, shows that James was on his own when he made some step-stones for John Winthrop of New London—and thereby hangs a footnote. For these stones Hamlin advanced the money, which Winthrop failed to repay, at least until he had received a caustic dunning letter. "I could not have thought" Hamlin wrote "A Gentleman of your honor and Abillity woold have served me such a little trick as to keep back my Just due that I payd down for you A year and halfe Ago & Desired no Recompence of you for my grate trouble I had In the procuring and sending [the stones] to you . . . S^{r} I expect the 7^{lb} by the first operertunity you have becaus I nede my money." Winthrop took his time, but finally paid for the stones the following August.

The estate of John Tobee (Middletown, 1728) paid "To James Stantliff for Grave Stones . . . £ 2-4-0," but as these stones cannot now be found it is impossible to describe his early style. He received £ 7-5-0 from the estate of Peter Pearson (Lyme, 1750), part of which was very probably for a gravestone, because the Pearson stone, except for wording, happens to be a dupli-

Fig. 2

cate of the stone for James' daughter, Sarah Stanclift, who died in East Middletown in 1748 (Fig. 2). These two stones resemble William's stones in general design, but the inscriptions show James using capital letters only at the beginning of words, and even then haphazardly. Moreover, the multifoliate rose which had been used since Dante's time as the symbol of paradise, and which William usually took such pains to carve, became in James' hands something more nearly resembling an uninspiring cartwheel. But it would be hazardous to lay down any final rules for differentiating the styles of the two brothers, especially since an occasional stone was carved with William's capital letters and James' flat rosettes, suggesting either that the two men greatly influenced one another, or were more closely associated than the records indicate.

Three signed receipts for money paid for gravestones in the Thomas and Sarah Giddings estates (Lyme, 1749 and 1755) reveal that James was making gravestones well beyond middle age. However, the lettering on the stone for Thomas Giddings (1754) is indistinguishable from that used by Thomas Johnson, one of the best Connecticut stone engravers of colonial times. Sometime before 1761, James Stanclift and Gideon Hale had joined with various members of the Johnson family to form a "quarry company," which eventually sold out to Nathaniel Shaler and Joel Hall about 1788. Inasmuch as James Stanclift was paid for the Giddings stone, a stone which shows many of Thomas Johnson's characteristics, it appears that Stanclift's individuality as a stonecutter was lost after he joined the company, perhaps sometime in the 1750's. After his death at the age of eighty, his inventory listed "Part of an old Gold Neck Lace . . . Quarry Stones . . [and] . . one Slate Stone," showing that despite many occupational hazards he was actively engaged until the end. He was survived by his wife, many daughters, and two sons, Comfort and James. This James, sometimes called "James ye 3rd," was still better known as "James of Chatham." He is also said to have made gravestones, and although his name appears fairly frequently in Middletown estates, so far no stones have been found which can definitely be attributed to him.

JAMES STANCLIFT (1712-1785)

As mentioned before, there were many James Stanclifts living in the eighteenth century, and just to make it hard, the one most commonly known as "James Stanclift, Junior" was actually the son of William. Though little was said about this James, he has been the easiest to trace because his whereabouts from time to time may be easily determined merely by noting the locations and dates of his distinctive style of gravestone. He had more originality and imagination than his uncle, James the second.

Anyone with more than a cursory interest in colonial gravestones of Hartford County must have had his curiosity aroused by an unusual type of stone in the old Wintonbury (Bloomfield) and Simsbury graveyards. Except in size and wording, most of these stones are duplicates of one another, yet they must have caught the public fancy at one time because they are fairly common. The most striking feature of these stones is the bizarre border design, so bizarre as to suggest a series of kidneys joined together with a rope, but which unquestionably was intended to represent fruit or flowers growing on a vine (Fig. 3). Early New England stonecutters, particularly in Massachusetts, usually filled their borders with various figures, such as pomegranates,

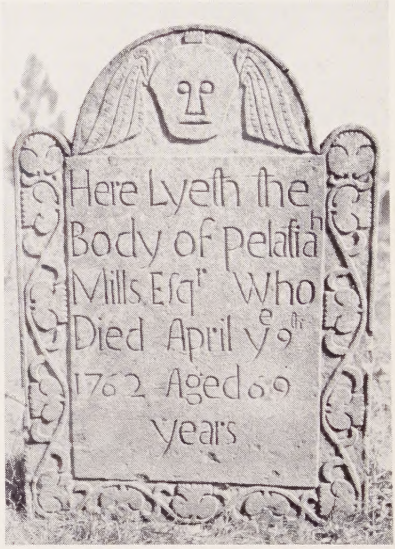

Fig. 3

figs, ears of corn, hearts, or birds, all symbolic of the soul or of the promised land, so the vines on these particular stones were probably meant as symbols of the soul reaching upward toward eternal light. Besides the unusual borders, the skulls are distinctive, too, with their deep, straight, wide and toothless mouths, truncated noses, broad foreheads, and their corrugated crowns balanced precariously on their tops. The stiff, angular appendages, looped back like window drapes, are supposed to represent wings of graceful angels. In contrast to the borders which appear to have been cut from a stencil because they are almost symmetrically perfect, the lettering is uneven, and there is hardly a stone that does not have an error, frequently in the inscription, more often in the verses of which this artist was so fond. Even on his few masterpieces, with their three or four stanza poems, errors in lettering stand out conspicuously (Fig. 1).

All of these stones as well as their corresponding probate papers were searched for the name of this unusual stonecutter, but only the estate of Peletiah Mills, Esquire, yielded the desired information. One of the administrators of this estate "paid to James Sancliff for tomb-Stones for father and grandfather . . . £ 5-10-0." This was somewhat of a surprise inasmuch as neither this type of border nor anything like it is to be found in the Middletown area where the Stanclifts lived. There is, however, one stone for "Elizbeth Wedo of Mr David Latimor" (East Middletown, 1754), now broken and shaled, which shows the same odd skull and wings, and, therefore, may safely be attributed to James Stanclift "Junior," particularly since it also shows his characteristic blunders in lettering. He did not develop his distinctive border until after he had arrived in Simsbury, because one of his earliest stones there (Joseph Tuller, 1756) shows his final design gradually evolving in the finial (Fig. 3).

Bates' Simsbury records show that this James Stanclift had left East Middletown sometime between 1756 and 1759; but he did not remain in Simsbury very long for neither his name nor style of gravestone can be found there after 1763.

It was still another surprise, on a subsequent gravestone hunt, to find this type of stone in the Woodbury-New Milford region, where it is also very common (Fig. 4). There is one such stone in Stratford; and despite stiff competition from such excellent stonecutters as Thomas Gold and William Lamson, Stanclift appears to have been the most popular stonecutter of Newtown. His own gravestone is in South Britain, and the records of that town reveal that he had arrived there sometime before September, 1764.

Fig. 4

The one disconcerting fact that had to be explained was that James Stanclift's gravestone was cut in the style which he himself had created and made so popular (Fig. 4). Could he, like Josiah Manning of Windham, have cut his own gravestone before he died? This idea had to be given up, because throughout the Southbury-Newtown area this style of gravestone continues well into the 1790's, and he could hardly have left so many uninscribed stones in his estate. There is considerable suggestive evidence that stones of this style bearing dates after 1785 were made by his son, still another James Stanclift, who was born in East Middletown in 1756. Even though they closely follow the style of the Simsbury stones, these late stones appear on close examination to have been cut by a less certain hand. The borders are not quite so regular, the lettering is frequently more shallow, the noses are a little broader, and the wings are not so angular.

Hard luck seemed to pursue James Stanclift "Junior" throughout life. Although he belonged to a well-established family of stonecutters, he was

probably obliged to leave his native town because of some tough competition from the Johnsons and other stone engravers whose names are as yet unknown. Stanclift was not much of a speller, yet he worked very hard in Simsbury, and the very intensity of his drive compelled him to make errors in simple words which he certainly knew how to spell. He must have spent days and days working on some stones and almost always with the same result—an exasperating error which he later tried to correct as best he could. Although he made gravestones for most of the important families in Simsbury, he apparently was not financially successful, for he owned no land, and his only business transactions that have so far come to light (aside from that in the Mills estate) are records of his debts, one to Isaac Barber for £ 4-16-2, dated 1762. Probably having heard the rumor that the inhabitants of Southbury were "very numerus and welthy," he went there with his thirteen children, but in South Britain he encountered a series of real tragedies. His eldest son, George, who also made gravestones, enlisted in the Army on August 15, and died in New York on September 1, 1776. A second son, Thomas, enlisted the same day, and died on September 18, according to his now broken and disintegrating gravestone, "in the service of his country." Another son, William, just turned sixteen, enlisted in May, 1777, was captured within a month, and was dead before 1779. James himself died December 27, 1785, in his seventy-fourth year. He was survived by his second wife, Mary (Lewis), most of his daughters, and a son, James, who also marched off to war with his older brothers, but who returned to South Britain to carry on the family tradition at least until the turn of the nineteenth century.

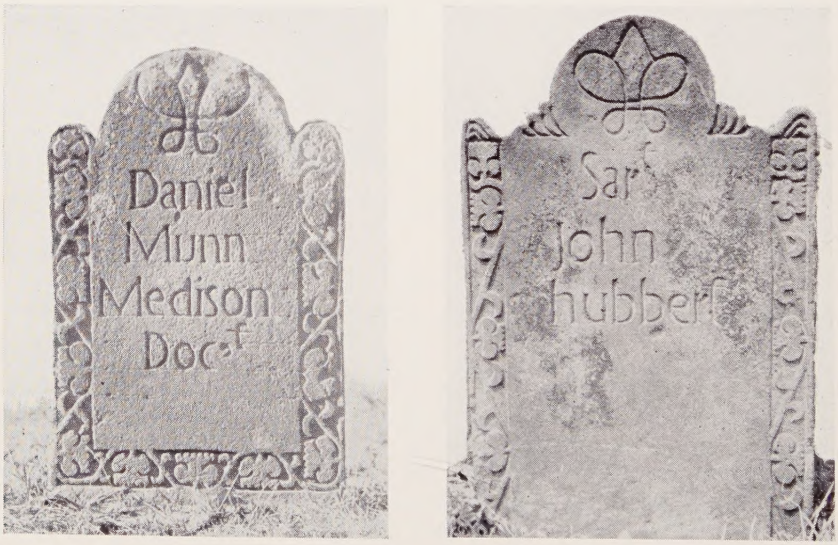

Fig. 5

Footstones by James Stanclift "Junior."

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

Edgar F. Waterman, President of the Society, has received the following award from The American Association for State and Local History.

For the purchase, renovation and enlargement of the Veeder house to serve as the Society's library, museum and headquarters, foreshadowing a great increase in the Society's usefulness to the people of the state and in public appreciation of the significance of history in that area.

Voted at the annual meeting of the Association in Newark, Delaware on June 15, 1951

ALBERT B. COREY, *President*
CLIFFORD L. LORD, *Chairman, Committee on Awards*

The American Association for State and Local History

Washington, D. C.

Award of Merit

The American Association for State and Local History is pleased to recognize and commend the distinctive contribution of the

Connecticut Historical Society

To American Local History, in witness whereof this Certificate is presented in accordance with the formal citation of the Committee on awards dated on the 15th day of June 1951 and transmitted to the proper officers.

Albert B. Corey
President

Clifford L. Lord
Chairman of the Committee on Awards

Construction and renovation of the building was completed in September. The Museum was opened in October and we are now rapidly getting settled.

The guest register already records visitors from 84 towns in Connecticut, 25 different states, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Bermuda, British West Indies, Venezuela and Scotland.

Several special exhibitions have been planned, the first of which took place January 22. Others are due in March and in April. Numerous clubs, societies and organizations have used the lecture room, and others are scheduled for the near future.

Membership has kept pace with other activities, with 29 members admitted at a single meeting and a total since May of 118. At no other time in the Society's 126 years have so many evidenced such interest in the affairs of the Society. We now have more than 800 members, and are looking forward to at least fifty more before the Annual Meeting.

Hundreds of boxes sealed for many years have been moved, and unpacking is proceeding slowly. There is still much remaining to be moved from the old building. This phase of the moving is at present delayed until shelving for the bottom level arrives and certain large crates are unloaded, clearing floor space needed for temporary storage of other boxes awaiting unpacking. The rapidity with which this is accomplished depends on the amount of time we can spend on the project. Experience has proven it must be done by our own staff, and with loaded schedules it is difficult to predict just how long it will require to have everything put away properly.

While unpacking, we have discovered hundreds of rare and important titles which have long been inaccessible. Many of these are listed in various bibliographies and, if desired, could not have been produced. Others are copies of titles for which we were not credited and, in some cases, no copies were located. Hundreds of Connecticut imprints have been uncovered which we would have purchased if offered, for we did not know we had them.

All of these books and pamphlets have to be checked in the catalogue and bibliographies for completeness, authors in some cases, and other information.

For a good many years we have relied on the Watkinson Library for general reference tools, such as Charles Evans' *American Bibliography*, David M. Stauffer's *American Engravers Upon Copper and Steel* and Mantle Fielding's supplement to Stauffer. By so doing we avoided what was then unnecessary duplication. Without these volumes we have been sadly crippled and worked under difficulties.

Recently we were fortunate in purchasing a fine set of Stauffer and Fielding and a reprint of the Evans. Shortly thereafter, Morgan B. Brainard learned of our need for Evans and presented to the Society his original set, which permits a set in both the Catalogue Room and Director's Office. This saves us much running back and forth and is of great value to the staff.

The price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.